

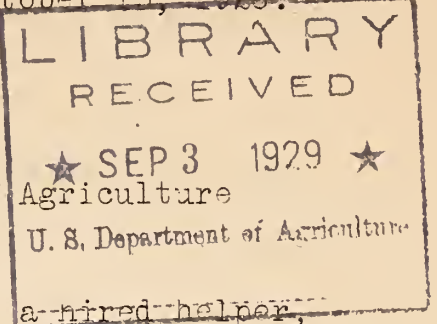
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WHO DOES THE LAUNDRY?

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Who is doing the laundry? Mother or one of the girls, ~~a hired helper,~~
a woman who takes it home, or the public laundry? This was the question
the Bureau of Home Economics of the United States Department of Agriculture
put to groups of women in the summer of 1927. Eight hundred and twenty-two
women reported how their family laundry was being done, and 168 self-
supporting women described what was done with theirs. The replies were
analyzed separately for families living on farms and in communities of under
5,000 in population, 5,000 to 25,000, 25,000 to 100,000, and 100,000 and
over.

Apparently somebody in the family has to work harder in the smaller
towns than in the larger. For as the size of place of residence grows the
proportion of families who reported the laundry done by a member of the
family decreases; while the percentage reporting laundering by a paid worker
in the home and by a public laundry increases. It is interesting to note
the domestic labor situation. For while the number of families that employ
a paid worker to do the laundry outside the home increases markedly from the
farm to the small town and then slightly for towns up to 25,000, it decreases
in cities of larger size. Does this mean that the public laundry in these
larger places is more satisfactory than in small towns, or that it is easier
to employ a maid to work in the home, or that the distances make it difficult
for a laundress to do the work outside? Or is it a combination of all these
factors?

It is quite apparent from this study that in the majority of families
in all communities a member of the family did the laundering of the family

clothing at home. The same is true in the case of household articles except in cities of over 100,000 where a larger proportion of families reported household articles done by the public laundry than by any other type of service.

Where laundry is done by a member of the family, a higher proportion of families reported laundering of women's hosiery and underwear and of men's hose than of other items of clothing, and of tablecloths and napkins than of sheets, pillowcases, or towels.

The material used in wearing apparel has an influence on the type of laundry service used. Silk and rayon garments were more often laundered by a member of the family than were cotton garments. The reverse is true in the case of other types of laundry service. A larger proportion of families reported laundering cotton garments by the paid worker either in or outside of the home and by the public laundry than reported laundering silk or rayon garments by these types of services.

In regard to household articles, a very much larger percentage of families laundered linen or "best" tablecloths and napkins themselves than used any other service, while most of the families sent their cotton tablecloths and napkins to the public laundry. There was little difference in the case of these articles between the use of the paid worker in and out of the home.

Does size of income have any influence on the type of laundry service used by a family? In going over this question farm families were not included, as their income to be comparable with the money income of city families should include an evaluation of the products produced on the farm and used by the family and also of the rental value of the farmhouse, and this could not be done in the present study. Of the 463 families reporting income, 197 had a family income of under \$3,000; 147, an income of

\$3,000 to \$5,000; 90, an income of \$5,000 to \$10,000; and 29, an income of \$10,000 and over.

For most articles there seems to be a very definite connection between the size of the family income and the type of laundry service used. In the case of all articles of clothing and of all household articles, as the income increased the proportion of families reporting laundering by a member of the family decreased markedly; while, except in the case of shirts and collars in the largest income group, the proportion of families reporting laundering by a paid worker in the home increased. The use of the public also increased with increase in size of income in the case of all items except women's hosiery. The influence of size of income on the employment of the paid worker outside the home was less marked, but in the case of clothing and of some household articles there was a tendency for it to increase with increased income.

A larger proportion of families with incomes of less than \$3,000 had their clothing and household articles laundered by a paid worker outside the home than had them done by a paid worker in the home, while the reverse was true in families with incomes of more than \$3,000. This is of course what one would expect, as the paid worker in the home was no doubt also doing other types of housework for these families.

In the group as a whole a member of the family is the important factor in laundry service. In the case of the various items of clothing, from 44 to 85 per cent of the families in the income groups under \$5,000 reported laundering by a member of the family. Even in families with incomes of between \$5,000 and \$10,000 the largest proportion of families reported laundering of women's and girls' dresses, underwear, and hosiery, and men's and boys'

hose, by a member of the family. This was also the case for women's and girls' hosiery and underwear in families with incomes of over \$10,000.

In the highest income group the largest proportion of families had women's and girls' handkerchiefs and dresses, and men's and boys' underwear, hose, and handkerchiefs, laundered by a paid worker in the home, and shirts and collars by a public laundry. This might indicate the articles which women feel are not as yet so satisfactorily done by the public laundry.

In the case of household articles, in over half of the families with incomes of under \$3,000 a member of the family laundered the pillowcases, sheets, tablecloths, napkins, and towels. On the other hand, in families with incomes of over \$5,000, sheets, pillowcases, and towels, and in those with incomes of over \$5,000, also tablecloths and napkins, were sent to the public laundry by a larger percentage of families than used any other type of laundry service.

On the whole, then, laundering by a member of the family is still predominately the service used by the women answering the question, "What type of laundry service do you use?" But as the size of the community increases, and as the income increases, other types, especially the public laundry, are substituted to a growing extent for the member of the family.

Now what about the independent self-supporting woman? What type of laundry service is she using? As in the case of families, a larger percentage of independent women in each of the five residence groups reported laundering most articles of clothing themselves than reported using any other type of service. In regard to household articles this was also true of the majority of single women living on farms. In villages of under 5,000 in population, however, household articles were usually laundered by a paid worker outside the home or by the public laundry, and in places of 5,000 and over were generally sent to the public laundry.

Size of place of residence does not have as much effect upon the laundry services used by the self-supporting woman as it has on families so far as clothing is concerned, except in the case of the paid worker in the home. As the residence groups increase in size of population, it was found that more of these women employed a maid in the home to launder their clothing. In the case of household articles, the proportion reporting laundering by themselves or by a member of the family was largest in the farm group, and decreased steadily with each larger residence group. The number employing a paid worker in the home, and the number that used the public laundry increased, in general, as size of residence increased. In some of the smaller places, however, none of these independent women reported employing a laundress or maid to do laundry work in the home. The use of a paid worker outside of the home increased decidedly from the farm to the smaller towns, but decreased in the larger communities.

Again, there is a similarity between the single woman and the family in regard to laundering of the various articles. Where the independent women did the laundry themselves a higher proportion reported laundering of hosiery than of any other article of clothing, and of tablecloths and napkins than of sheets, pillowcases, or towels. Also a larger proportion laundered silk or rayon garments themselves than laundered those of cotton. Only a very few reported the laundering of silk or rayon garments in any other way. Cotton dresses and underwear, however, were generally done by a paid worker outside the home or by the public laundry.

If the self-supporting women living elsewhere than on farms are grouped according to incomes of under \$3,000 and of over \$3,000, the type of laundry service used is found to differ in the two groups. In the case of articles of clothing, women with incomes of over \$3,000 use the paid worker in the

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home more and the other three types of service less than those with incomes of under \$3,000. For household articles a larger proportion of women with incomes of \$3,000 and over reported laundering of tablecloths and napkins by a paid worker outside the home and sheets, pillowcases, and towels by a public laundry, than was reported by those with incomes of less than \$3,000.

In each income group a higher percentage reported laundering their clothing themselves or by a member of the family than reported the use of any other type of laundry service. Over half of these women launder their underwear and hosiery, and those with less than \$3,000 incomes about half launder their dresses and handkerchiefs themselves. It is interesting that of those with incomes of \$3,000 and more, over a fourth launder their dresses and handkerchiefs and over half their hosiery and underwear. However, the proportion of those who launder their household articles themselves is low. Does this mean that with the wearing of silk and rayon laundering of articles of clothing is coming to be just a part of the day's job and not of the week's wash?